

## **For the love of a park...**

### **Creating a Poetry Contest at Your Park**

This program, created by Ranger Tom Randolph at Mt. Jefferson State Natural Area, was first an optional program offered by the park in the local school districts. It's become so popular that it's now a required assignment by many teachers across Ashe County.

#### **Why offer a poetry contest?**

- "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" – Wordsworth
- It invokes and allows participants to describe an emotional dimension of perception and ownership – this develops awareness & stewardship in the public
- Poetry shows up on EOG's for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and there are extensions for all grades in the Common Core Standards; this is a great, creative way for teachers to cover creative writing and be involved with our parks
- It's easy! Just line up the judges & prizes and let the kids bring the creativity!

#### **How??**

1<sup>st</sup> priority is Prizes:

- Get donors & funding for prizes lined up to provide motivation to participate
- Use your local friends group, local businesses, or other environmental outreach venues to provide prizes that have a cost (fishing pole, tent, small telescope, etc.)
- Your park can provide free prizes too! (free night of camping, etc.)

2<sup>nd</sup> priority is Judges:

- School staff or leaders from participating groups should NOT be judges!
- Park staff, PAC or Friends members, librarians etc. can nominate their top choices to send on to a final judge (MOJE uses a State Poet Laureate local to the park)

3<sup>rd</sup> priority is to Advertise:

- Get the word out to the schools or community you want participating!
- Deliver posters with big envelopes for collecting entries to the schools, make PSA's, or whatever works for your community
- For school groups, include how participating will meet curriculum requirements

#### **Nuts & Bolts: (if you want more tips, contact Tom at MOJE)**

- MUST be focused on your park (that means, participants have been there before, they've learned something about the significance of your park)
- Divide into age groups and categories (Poetry of Science, Cultural History, Rangers Choice, Excellence in Poetry etc.) this makes judging fair and allows for more creative venues to be recognized
- Hold an award ceremony to celebrate winners (& further advertise program)
- Get a digital voice recorder! Record students sharing their poetry; not only is this great to have for further promotion but there is nothing like hearing poetry in the young poets own voice!

### **Curriculum Correlations**

Poetry is an accepted extension of creative writing (in addition to narratives). These are just examples, there are more extensions in the English Language Arts curriculum as well as the science and history curriculums (for when schools visit to learn about your park).

#### [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3](#)

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

#### [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.5](#)

Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

### **Poetry Examples from Mount Jefferson:**

A poem written in the perspective of a runaway slave hiding on Mt. Jefferson. K. Phipps wrote this after learning about the Underground Railroad and the possibility of a hiding place on the mountain.

The night is still, quiet, peaceful  
A gentle breeze blows through  
the trees and echoes through  
the hollow cliff  
where I stay  
If I could sleep, I would  
but I never sleep very much  
I am unable  
to escape, escape the night  
the night they came  
the night they came for me

the night the wind howled  
but all I could hear was footsteps  
footsteps pounding  
all I could see was the light  
the light from their lanterns  
what I could feel  
was my heart pounding,  
pounding inside my chest  
they pass by me  
I will stay here as long  
as I have to,  
I will stay on this mountain  
which will later be called Mount Jefferson.

More poetry examples written by students after field trips to Mt. Jefferson:

**I Am**

I am beautiful and wise.  
I wonder what the other mountains do to pass the time.  
I hear the cold wind blowing around me  
I see the towns below me.  
I want to be able to share my knowledge  
I am beautiful and wise.

I pretend that I could change my locale, so everybody could see my splendor.  
I feel hiker's feet strutting around my trails.  
I touch the hair of Mother Nature.  
I worry if my park will close.  
I cry when no hikers come to have fun.  
I am beautiful and wise

I understand I will be here a long time.  
I say, "it's never too late to improve".  
I dream I will stay here forever.  
I try to keep my trees looking attractive.  
I hope my park will stay open for many, many years.  
I am beautiful and wise.

- A. Macknee

**Lucky One**

I dearly love the mountains  
Where I live.  
With trees and spreading flowers  
Everywhere.  
I also love  
The sound a poem makes when  
Words are chosen with love and care.  
I am a very  
Lucky one to live where  
I can walk up higher than the trees.  
And feel Mount Jefferson's  
Everlasting breeze.

- S. Cox